

Briefing paper for Wiltshire Health & Wellbeing Board

Temporary transfer of deliveries at Trowbridge Birthing Centre to Chippenham Birthing Centre

Maternity services in Wiltshire - background

The Trust's Maternity Service includes two acute maternity units located at the Princess Anne Wing (PAW) at the Royal United Hospital (RUH) in Bath and at the Great Western Hospital (GWH) in Swindon. In addition to this, the Trust operates five stand-alone birth centres across Wiltshire, Somerset and BANES; located in Frome, Shepton Mallet, Trowbridge, Chippenham and Paulton (which together with PAW these services comprise the Bath Clinical Area). The Trust also operates the co-located White Horse Birth Centre located at the GWH.

The Trust has provided the Bath Clinical Area maternity services since June 2011 following a tendering exercise led by Wiltshire PCT. The Trust is one of the largest maternity providers in the country with 269.8 Whole Time Equivalent (WTE) Midwives working across the Trust to provide 24/7 maternity services delivering over 9,000 babies each year.

For the Bath Clinical Area specifically, the numbers of births in each location are as follows:

	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
Chippenham B	311	308	236
Trowbridge	352	344	292
Bath Community	71	73	60
Frome	204	188	204
Paulton	218	197	164
Shepton Mallet	0	1	0
PAW	4004	3919	3644
Total	5160	5030	4600

Background to the temporary transfer of deliveries from Trowbridge Birth Centre

In December 2012, the Care Quality Commission (CQC) as part of their unannounced inspection programme, visited three maternity sites within the Trust - Princess Anne Wing, Trowbridge Birthing Centre and the Great Western Hospital (GWH). The CQC report following this inspection identified that the Trust's staffing ratios for midwives did not meet Birthrate Plus national guidelines.

In response to these findings the Trust carried out a maternity staffing and skill mix review across all locations to ensure appropriate staffing levels. It became clear through this review that there was a clear shortfall of midwives and as a result an action plan was developed with the aim of improving the Midwife to Birth Ratio to around 1:32 – 1:34.

£250,000 investment was agreed by the Trust to recruit additional Midwives to increase staffing levels across the service. Despite the extra investment in additional staffing, it became clear that the additional midwifery posts would not be filled as quickly as required due to shortages of Midwives nationally and the time it takes to recruit to these posts.

The work taking place to recruit additional Midwives has since been overseen by a project board meeting on a monthly basis to coordinate efforts.

At the same time, between February and March 2013 the overall rate of staff sickness at the Princess Anne Wing increased significantly from 2.04% to 19.02% creating significant pressure on the service. In developing plans to respond to this issue, the staffing forecasts highlighted that the problem would continue into the summer leaving the service short staffed by between two and four Midwives on most shifts

As a result, business continuity plans for the service identified ways the safety of services could be maintained. The plans concluded that if staffing issues persisted, a temporary redesign of the service would be needed so that staff could be released and reallocated to the maternity unit at the Princess Anne Wing (in accordance with the Trust's Maternity Escalation Policy).

The temporary transfer of intra-partum care (deliveries) from Trowbridge to Chippenham Birth Centre was identified as the most viable option as it would release the highest number of midwives to work in the maternity unit at the Princess Anne Wing, whilst maintaining and providing a safe service for mothers and babies.

However, the Trust was keen to explore all alternative options before making a decision such as this. During May and June further work was carried out to explore the potential to use agency staff; however it was agreed that the use of agency Midwives posed an unacceptable risk to patient safety and that all other staffing options had been considered.

During May 2013, despite staffing levels often running at -3 or -4, the PAW maternity service was safely maintained, primarily by relying on the goodwill of staff doing additional shifts and staff transferring from birth centres on an ad hoc basis when there was the potential to do so. This was clearly not sustainable over the medium term and towards the end of June a decision was taken by the Trust to temporarily transfer intra-partum care from Trowbridge to other neighbouring units between 14th July and 30th September to address the temporary staffing issue affecting the Bath Clinical Area.

Current position

Trowbridge Birthing Centre continues to offer a daytime service from 9am – 5pm for antenatal and postnatal appointments, drop-in service, infant feeding classes and parent education and advice. From 5pm the telephone number usually used by mothers is transferred to Chippenham Birthing Centre where they will be able to speak to a midwife for advice anytime between 5pm and 8am.

Approximately 100 women were notified that they would not be able to give birth at Trowbridge Birth Centre and were offered alternatives. Not all of these women were due to deliver during this time period, some had due dates a little outside of this timeframe, but we wanted to ensure communication as wide with the women who were primarily impacted by the decision. Due to the anxiety this decision may have caused, maternity staff at

neighbouring Birth Centres were made available to offer tours of the facilities to reassure women of the standard of care that would be provided.

Up to mid-August, of the 26 women scheduled to give birth in Trowbridge Birth Centre, 22 gave birth in Frome Birth Centre and four in Chippenham Birth Centre.

A daily review of staffing levels takes place to ensure that the right numbers of staff are allocated to meet demand.

Recruitment and the continuation of births at Trowbridge

The Trust remains on schedule to start births at Trowbridge Birthing Centre again at the end of September following successful efforts to recruit additional Midwives into the service

In August a further £430,000 investment has been made in additional Midwifery staff (for Midwives and Maternity Support Workers) which is in addition to the £250,000 investment made earlier this year. This demonstrates a significant commitment by the Trust to ensure the right staffing levels for the service.

To date seven Midwives have been recruited to the Bath Clinical Area with three due to start at the beginning of September and a further four at the end of September. A further two Midwives have been appointed to the Bath Community Maternity Team with start dates to be confirmed.

In addition a Recruitment Assessment Day was held in August with the aim of recruiting more Midwives into the Trust and 13 newly qualified Midwives were offered posts to fill remaining vacancies in the service. The Trust also plans further international recruitment in Ireland at the end of August.

The Trust acknowledges that the announcement of the temporary transfer could have been handled better with specific engagement of the Health Select Committee, the Health and Well Being Board and the Local Area Board. The Trust has learned lessons from this for the future. The committee should be assured that the decision was not taken lightly but in response to significant staffing pressures facing the service which showed no short term prospect of being resolved.

The rationale for the transfer outlined above demonstrates the considerable efforts that have been taken within the Trust to look at every alternative option to maintain the safety and quality of the service prior to the decision to temporarily transfer births was taken.

Prior to the resumption of 'normal service' at Trowbridge, local stakeholders and the local community will be informed.

Nerissa Vaughan
Chief Executive